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**Re: SUPPORTING A 3-DIMENSIONAL MODEL**

Mayor Wynn and Members of the Austin City Council

On 27 November, 2006, the Design Commission (DC) received a compelling presentation from Laura Morrison, ANC, and Wendy Todd, SRCC, regarding the need for a digital 3-Dimensional Model of the Town Lake Corridor.

Their presentation focused on the more than twenty projects in the design and construction phases on and around Town Lake, many of which were, and are, in various stages of application for up zonings and variances to the waterfront overlay. They felt that, were these zonings and variances granted, the results would compromise protections that are currently in place. They pointed out, we believe quite correctly, that citizens of Austin are generally unaware of the major changes these buildings will have on our town, and they suggested that our decision makers do not fully realize the impacts of these projects.

The Design Commission does NOT intend, by the issuance of this letter, to support or oppose any specific zoning or variance case, nor should it be misconstrued that we oppose vigorous development within the Town Lake Corridor. But we do enthusiastically agree with their contention that "the current process for evaluating applications for up zoning and variances to the waterfront overlay is of limited vision and does not allow the community and decision makers to evaluate the changes with a comprehensive view of the impacts to the Town Lake Corridor". As they point out, "Only 2-dimensional plans are required to accompany the applications, and even then, 2-dimensional elevations are required in limited circumstances."

Their suggested solution to this problem is the development of a 3-dimensional model of the Town Lake Corridor, including all existing and proposed developments. They emphasize that this would allow the community and decision makers to perform an educated and informed evaluation of the impacts of up zonings and waterfront overlay variances along the lake.

The Design Commission is aware of the Case Studies these citizens cited in Philadelphia, Tallahassee, San Francisco, and Berkeley. In addition, the recent DC delegation to Portland discovered that the city maintains a digital 3-D model of the downtown core for upholding their Vision for their City Plan. All proposed development applications are required to provide digital information of the projects to be inserted into the model. This information is then made available to staff, Boards, and Commissions and to the public for review and comment.

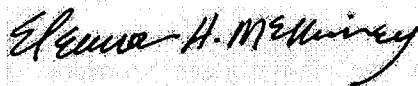
We not only agree that the Town Lake Corridor would benefit from such a tool, we believe it has great merit for the entire downtown area (which we consider to be an area larger than that commonly titled the "Core"), and also for other nodes where development is expected or encouraged, such as Transit Oriented Developments (TODs), Corridors, and other areas where growth pressures are anticipated or where development is encouraged. We believe there is an urgent need for:

- Development of a comprehensive, three-dimensional model of Austin, starting with the greater downtown area including the Town Lake Corridor
- Include, as a baseline, all existing roadways, parks, transportation facilities, and building structures.
- Include all currently proposed projects within the initial area.
- Maintain the 3D model, as proposals and projects are modified.
- Expand the model over time to include all areas where growth is expected or encouraged.

The Design Commission, in executing its role in advising the City council in the area of Urban Design in general, about the design of the public realm, and in providing evaluation of specific projects, has an acute need for a maintained comprehensive 3D model that requires planners, architects, and developers to accurately depict their projects in the context of their environments, so that we can make more informed evaluations and recommendations to the City Council.

We urge the City Council to direct staff to move forward with the development of the 3-D tool immediately.

Sincerely,



Eleanor McKinney, Chair  
Austin Design Commission

Cc:  
Laura Huffman, Assistant City Manager  
Greg Guernsey, Director, Neighborhood Planning and Zoning  
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